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Housekeepers' Chat

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Subject "Serve Them Fresh." Information from W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. D. A.

Publication available: "Home Storage of Vegetables."

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The other day W. R. B., the Garden Adviser, knocked at my kitchen door.

"Aunt Sammy," he said, "would you accept a basket of string beans for your dinner table?"

Would I! If there's anything I'm especially fond of, in the vegetable line, it's fresh string beans.

"Come in," I said, "and watch me prepare them. 'Out of the garden and over the fire' is my motto when it comes to fresh vegetables."

"Out of the garden and over the fire," repeated the Garden Adviser. "A very good rule to observe with such vegetables as sweet corn, string beans -- pardon me, I mean stringless beans -- Lima beans, kale, cabbage, and spinach. The odds are all in favor of the vegetables that come to our kitchens fresh and crisp. Isn't that so, Aunt Sammy?"

"Of course. Seems to me that this is a 'betwixt and between' season for fresh vegetables. The early summer garden products are about gone, and the fall crops are not yet ready. I may have to fall back on my canned vegetables for a while. Did you know that I have a few choice cans of tomatoes, green beans, peas, and corn on the pantry shelves?"

"A good idea," said my friend. "But nowadays it's always harvest time for fresh vegetables, in some part of the country. With our wonderful transportation system, we can have practically all kinds of fresh vegetables, at all times of the year. I can remember the days when we looked forward to spring, for spring brought lettuce and radishes. The ripening of the first tomatoes was almost an occasion for celebrating. Remember those days, Aunt Sammy?"

"Indeed I do. The first ripe tomato from our garden patch was a prize. By a gentleman's agreement, between my brothers and myself, the first ripe tomato was to be divided equally among us. The agreement was all right, provided one of the brothers didn't make off with the tomato before it was ripe. How times have changed! Now we have lettuce, radishes, tomatoes, celery, green beans, spinach, carrots, and a whole array of fresh vegetables all the year 'round. I never get tired of fresh vegetables."

"You don't?" said W. R. B. "My daughter Patty does. Last night she came to the dinner table singing 'String beans for dinner, string beans for supper, string beans, string beans string beans! I am through with string beans. I never want to see another string bean, as long as I live!' 'What in the world has happened?' said her mother. 'I'm sick of string beans,' said Patty, and she gave her chair such a hard bump against the table that the dishes rattled. 'For two weeks,' said Patty, 'we've had string beans every day. Variety is the spice of life, and we need some spice in this family!'

"Well, Patty was right. The beans were wonderful -- fresh, crisp, right from the garden but we had had too many string beans. Tell your home gardeners, Aunt Sammy, whether they are planting fall and winter gardens, or storing vegetables for winter use, to have plenty of variety. There are at least 10 vegetables to grow in southern gardens during the winter -- cabbage, kale, collards, turnips, spinach, carrots, beets, tomatoes, onions, and lettuce. Vegetables grown in northern gardens, which may be stored for winter use, include cabbage, turnips, beets, carrots, celery, and winter radishes. The important consideration in the storage of fresh vegetables is temperature and moisture control. Have you mentioned the bulletin on Home Storage of Vegetables this fall, Aunt Sammy?"

"No. It's a good thing you reminded me. 'Home Storage of Vegetables,' Farmers' Bulletin Number 879. Come one, come all, and get your copy from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

"Now let me ask you a question, W. R. B. How can I grow lettuce, radishes and parsley, right up to Christmas?"

"Try a coldframe," suggested the Garden Adviser. "Cover a frame with sash, and then spread old matting or some temporary covering over the glass on cold nights. The frames and the sash do not cost much. Why don't you locate the coldframe on the south side of the garage? Then it will be protected from the cold winds of late fall. Don't try to grow tender crops like tomatoes and cucumbers in the frames -- plant only those that will stand considerable cold. Any more questions?"

"Yes. Is it possible to store vegetables so that they will keep fresh?"

"Certainly," said the Garden Adviser. "The main point is to store them so that they will not become stale. Some vegetables, beets, turnips, carrots, and cabbage, in particular, have a great tendency to wilt if they are stored in the cellar, especially if the temperature cannot be kept down around 38 degrees, and if they are allowed to dry out. For this reason, it's a good idea to store beets, turnips, carrots, and cabbage in pits out of doors. Of course, the pits must be so constructed that they will keep the vegetables from freezing. The pits must also be ventilated, so that the vegetables will not be too warm. Any more questions, Aunt Sammy?"

"One more. What if you want to store only small quantities -- say three or four kinds of vegetables -- just for home use?"

"In that case," said my friend, "get a large box or barrel, bury it in the ground, in a well-drained place, store your vegetables in it, and cover it over with straw and earth, to keep the vegetables from freezing. If the barrel is placed on its side, the opening can be closed with boards and banked

with earth, making a miniature storage house. If you want such vegetables as beets, turnips, and carrots to remain fresh when they are stored in a cool cellar, better pack them in clean sand that is slightly moistened. Then add a little water from time to time, to keep the sand from drying out. If you are careful about storing the vegetables, you can keep them fresh and serve them fresh during the winter."

W. R. B. rose to go, and I thanked him for his information, and for the string beans.

If Uncle Ebenezer is not too busy, I shall suggest that he make a coldframe south of the garage, plant more lettuce, parsley, and radishes, and ^{also} store a few of our garden vegetables. We must have vegetables in the cold winter months, for hungry school children need lots of vegetables all the year round.

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